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THE PARADOX OF OXFORD

By

PAUL ELMER MORE

Editor of *The Nation*

From the Proceedings of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club and Classical Conference
held at Ann Arbor, Michigan, April 4, 1913

HUMANISTIC PAPERS, SECOND SERIES, III

Reprint from the *School Review*, June, 1913

Monograph



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THE PARADOX OF OXFORD¹

PAUL E. MORE
New York City

It is commonly agreed that no other city in Great Britain lays so potent a spell on the visitor as Oxford. The gardens of the sister university along the Cam may catch the charm of an English summer more entrancingly; Edinburgh, with her crown of hills, and her cavernous wynds, may be more picturesque; London, with her pride of empire, her spoils of art, her web of human triumphs and despair, may be more appalling to the imagination; but there is something in the aspect of the crowded, cloistered colleges of Oxford that penetrates more deeply into the mind of the observer and leaves him not quite the same man as before. Such at least was my experience last summer when I visited the town for the first time. "There is an air about it resonant of joy and hope: it speaks with a thousand tongues to the heart; it waves its mighty shadow over the imagination: . . . its streets are paved with the names of learning that can never wear out: its green quadrangles breathe the silence of thought, conscious of the weight of yearnings innumerable after the past, of loftiest aspirations for the future."

It was this feeling of the intellectual hopes and moral ideas of many generations of men here made visible in stone, rather than what has been called the "almost despairing sense of loveliness," that stirred me profoundly as I walked from court to court in the expressive silence of the long vacation. It was a feeling good and salutary for the heart. Yet in the end the impression left upon me was curiously mixed. I was elated and teased at the same time; my spirits were, so to speak, both enlarged and contracted. In part this was due, no doubt, to the manifest incongruities of the town itself as it has developed in these latter years. From the

¹ Address before the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club at Ann Arbor, Michigan, April 4, 1913.

mediaeval seclusion of a quadrangle one steps into a street now bustling with modern shops and a very unmediaeval throng of shoppers. Only a little while ago, in Matthew Arnold's day, "the pleasant country still ran up to the walls and gates of the colleges; no fringe of mean or commonplace suburbs interposed between the coronal of spires and towers and its green setting." But now, if the visitor, with his mind filled with the lonely religious wrestlings of Newman, would walk out to Iffley and Littlemore, he must pass through long rows of vulgar and tawdry villas. There is something disconcerting in these inharmonious contrasts. And, guided perhaps by this discord of the past and the present, one begins to be aware of something paradoxical in the beauty and significance of the university itself. The very architecture of the place, with all its charm, is a kind of anomaly. "True to her character of the home of lost causes and impossible loyalties, Oxford clung with a tragic desperation to her ancient garments of Gothic pattern, hugging them about her until, worn to rags and tatters, they dropped off, and she was constrained to clothe her nakedness with the sole contemporary dress available in the eighteenth century, to wit, that sheer Palladianism into which the illusory 'New Birth' movement itself had by that time degenerated. Thus it befell that Oxford architecture never passed through the normal gamut of successive phases of declension from the sixteenth century onward, but that between the perfection of English mediaeval masoncraft . . . and the corrupt fashion of Trinity, Queen's, and Worcester Colleges, . . . there was no intermediate stage but that of the so-called 'Oxford Gothic.' "¹

And this "picturesque hybrid" in building, which is neither Renaissance nor mediaeval, neither quite Greek nor quite Christian, is symbolical of what Oxford has stood for intellectually and morally. With good right one of her own living poets has described her as

. . . . the mother of celestial moods,
Who o'er the saints' inviolate array
Hath starred her robe of fair beatitudes
With jewels worn by Hellas.

¹ Aymer Vallance, *The Old Colleges of Oxford*.

There is, if you stop to think about it, this huge inconsistency underlying the institution of Oxford. It was founded as a monastic school to train boys for the priesthood, and its colleges still bear something of the outward appearance of cloistered retreats. Until well into the last century every matriculant was obliged to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles, and still today the policy of the university is largely controlled by a Convocation of black-robed priests who come up from their country parishes with the zeal of the church burning in their breasts. Yet education at Oxford, though it was at the first directed to monkish ends and though until very recently it retained a good deal of that scholastic coloring, was from an early date, if not from the beginning, crossed with Pagan ideals. Aristotle was held to be an authority in morals by the side of St. Augustine, prayers were offered to Jehovah when Olympian Zeus was in the heart of the worshiper, and boys were taught, are still taught, to mold their emotions at once to the modes of the Psalms and of Horace.

This is what I have meant by the classical paradox of Oxford, giving it that name not because this inconsistency is peculiar to the university, but because there more than anywhere else it is driven into the imagination by the teasing charm of a petrified and glorified tradition. It is indeed, if we look below the surface of things, deeply imbedded in the foundations of our whole modern life and points far back to that Hellenistic civilization in which the ideals of Greece and the Orient were mingled to produce the new world. To explain what I mean by this questionable but very fruitful union, I cannot do better than quote a few sentences from the little treatise of Lucian called *The Wisdom of Nigrinus*. We have in this dialogue the story of a visit to a philosopher of the second century of our era who styled himself a Platonist, a denizen of Rome but probably enough, like his friend Lucian, a child of Asia. One of the persons of the dialogue, having been in Rome, reports thus the philosopher's own account of his mode of life:

Choosing thereby a sort of life which seems to most people womanish and spiritless, I converse with Plato, Philosophy, and Truth, and seating myself, as it were, high up in a theater full of untold thousands, I look down on what takes place, which is of a quality sometimes to afford amusement and laughter,

sometimes to prove a man's true steadfastness. . . . One has cause to admire philosophy when he beholds so much folly, and to despise the gifts of fortune when he sees on the stage of life a play of many rôles, in which one man enters first as servant, then as master; another first as rich, then as poor. . . . I have said that there is food for laughter and amusement in what goes on; let me now explain it. To begin with, are not the rich ridiculous? They display their purple gowns and show their rings and betray an unbounded lack of taste. . . . Far more ridiculous, however, than the rich are those who visit them and pay them court. They get up at midnight, run all about the city, let servants bolt the doors in their faces, and suffer themselves to be called dogs, toadies, and similar names. By way of reward for this galling round of visits they get the much-talked-of dinner, a vulgar thing, the source of many evils. [Translated by A. M. Harmon.]

All this, the visitor goes on to say, seemed to Nigrinus quite ludicrous. And further, he reports, Nigrinus

made special mention of people who cultivate philosophy for hire and put virtue on sale over a counter. . . . For he maintained that one who intends to teach contempt of wealth should first of all show that he is himself above gain. Certainly he used to put these principles into practice. . . . So far was he from coveting the property of others that even when his own property was going to rack and ruin he did not concern himself about it. . . . He made no secret of his condemnation of the sort of philosophers who think it a course in virtue if they train the young to endure "full many pains and toils," the majority recommending cold baths, though some whip them, and still others, the more refined of their sort, scrape the surface of their skin with a knife-blade.

As for the visitor to Nigrinus, he himself tells the strange effect of the philosopher's words upon him.

In a great fit of confusion and giddiness [he says], I dripped with sweat, I stumbled and stuck in the endeavor to speak, my voice failed, my tongue faltered, and finally I began to cry in embarrassment. . . . My wound was deep and vital, and his words, shot with great accuracy, clove, if I may say so, my very soul in twain.

This, it is almost necessary to observe, is not a scene of conversion from Wesley's *Diary*, but is a page from the book of one who, more perhaps than any other writer of his age, was steeped in the traditional learning of Greece. Yet what a change! How far we have got from Pindar's song of "wisdom blooming in the soul," from his praise of the man who, because death awaits at the end, will not "sit vainly in the dark through a dull and nameless age,

and without lot in noble deeds," and from his glorification of those upon whom, for their reverence of things divine in the hour of triumph, "the pleasant lyre and the sweet pipe shed their grace"! We have gone a great way from Aristotle's notion of the magnanimous man, the *μεγαλόψυχος*, who in winning the world has won also his own soul. And even if, formally, the ideal of Nigrinus can in a way be connected with Plato's contrast of the visible and invisible worlds, yet the *animus*, so to speak, of the new wisdom is something very different from that which heartened men in the garden of the Athenian Academy. In place of the philosopher who, seeking the vision of the gods, still kept in his heart the fair and happy things of Hellas, and who, knowing the emptiness of life's rewards, was nevertheless ready to serve and govern the state, we now have one who regards it as the highest goal of life to sit in a kind of idle abstraction from the world and hypnotize himself with the wisdom of his lord. This new race of philosophers indeed, whom Lucian eulogizes on one page and ridicules on another, are but bearded monks who have not learned the name of their real master; they speak the words of Athens, but with barbarous images in their souls. Their denial of practical life will be known through the Middle Ages as the *contemptus mundi*, and already one sees how their asceticism and their praise of poverty divide them harshly into saints and hypocrites not entirely unlike those of the cloister.

There is an emotional difference between the philosophers of the Hellenistic world and the monks of the Christian world, due largely no doubt to the fact that the former still confessed the Socratic doctrine, however they may have distorted it, whereas the latter honestly subjected it to what they regarded as a higher revelation. Yet the paradox still troubles the new religion. The basis of education, in language entirely and to no small extent in ideas, remains Greek and Latin, however the superstructure may be Christian and oriental. Nor were the Fathers and rulers of the church unaware of this; their trick of decrying Pagan literature is due in no small part to a feeling of uneasy dependence on it for their knowledge and philosophy. They would use it and at the same time spurn it under their feet as they reached up to the celestial wisdom. So in a comment on a verse in Kings: "But all the Israelites went down

to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, his coulter, and his axe," Gregory the Great, or some other, applies the words to the contrast between the classical tradition and the new faith.

We go down to the Philistines [he says] when we incline the mind to secular studies; Christian simplicity is upon a height. Secular books are said to be in the plain since they have no celestial truths. God put secular knowledge in a plain before us that we should use it as a step to ascend to the heights of Scripture. So Moses first learned the wisdom of the Egyptians that he might be able to understand and expound the divine precepts; Isaiah, most eloquent of the prophets, was *nobiliter instructus et urbanus*; and Paul had sat at Gamaliel's feet before he was lifted to the height of the third heaven. One goes to the Philistines to sharpen one's plow, because secular learning is needed as a training for Christian preaching.¹

But if mediaeval man, in general, was ready to accept the Pagan tradition as a mere treasure of the Philistines to be plundered for the benefit of the chosen people, there were those also who made a brave attempt to effect a reconciliation—always, of course, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. The most notable of these efforts is the stupendous *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas, in which the newly recovered philosophy of Aristotle is welded into Christian doctrine to make a vast body of theology. The words of the Philosopher (no other name is needed to designate Aristotle, as the master of those that know) and sentences of the Fathers are quoted together without distinction as if they were of one and the same authority. But, despite the admirable patience and inexhaustible cunning of the Angelic Doctor, an instructed reader can go through his work and distinguish the two elements of which his system is composed, as we can separate the two metals of an alloy; there is no chemical compound here, but a mechanical mixture. The distinction can be made visible to the eyes by turning to Dante, whose allegory of the future is based frankly on the *Summa* of St. Thomas. There is significance in the very guides who carry the pilgrim through hell and purgatory up to the celestial sphere. In the first two realms, Virgil, the bearer of the classical tradition, is sufficient, but when the poet from the earthly Paradise is about to mount to the heavenly Paradise and the vision of God he needs the help of Beatrice, who is the symbol and voice of theology.

¹ From H. O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind*.

When we pass from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance we find two notable movements aiming at an elimination of this inherited inconsistency. One of these may be called the Pagan revival. It was nothing less than an effort to surmount the difficulty by throwing away the moral ideals of both Christianity and classicism and clinging to the purely natural and imaginative aspects of the ancient world in what came to be regarded as Paganism. Not a little of the art and literature of Italy is of that utterly non-moral sort. The other movement undertook to reconcile Greek philosophy and Christianity in a synthesis which should embrace the higher and, in this differing from the work of St. Thomas, the less dogmatic elements of each. This was the half-avowed purpose of the Cambridge Platonists, a noble ambition which somehow, owing perhaps to the absence of any great genius among them, they just failed to achieve. Their failure was the tragedy of the age, and left the task still to be accomplished, if, indeed, it can in any way be accomplished.

It may seem that I am dwelling over much on a commonplace; yet I doubt if we often realize how deeply this discrepancy lies imbedded in our modern civilization. Certainly the knowledge of it came to me last summer at Oxford with the force almost of discovery. And I remember the hour and the place of the awakening. It was one gray day in the quadrangle of Oriel College, as I stood by the entrance to the Common Room looking up at the windows of what had been the rooms of John Henry Newman. In that college the Oxford Movement had its inception and passed away. The little group of scholars who in the Common Room met together and discussed the meaning of religion and the office of the church were men trained and steeped in Aristotle and the other classics; they never lost that discipline, yet their whole endeavor was to bring back the mediaeval interpretation of life. An amusing incident of this tendency is connected with Dr. Hampden's Bampton Lectures on scholastic philosophy, delivered in 1832, and afterward published. No one in Oxford read the book, not even Newman who wrote against it, and no one there had read any scholastic philosophy, says Mr. Mozley, who ought to know; he even declares that the book is unreadable, and I, for one, have

taken his word for it. Yet the rumor got about that Dr. Hampden was trying to undermine the authority of mediaeval tradition, and the horror and hubbub were enormous. The situation became at least anomalous when Hampden, though Regius Professor of Divinity, was deprived of his place on the board that chose the Select Preachers for the University.

These things came to my mind as I stood in the quiet quadrangle of Oriel, and then I remembered the life of the man who must so often in moments of perplexity have looked out of the windows over my head, gathering from this very scene comfort and strength for his battle with the world. Newman, if anyone, was the very embodiment of the Oxford spirit, and if we think of his great struggle as a hesitation between the Anglican and Roman churches, it was, in a deeper sense, the agony of an intuitive soul caught in the dilemma of the two traditions of which the very stones of his college with their hybrid architecture, neither Renaissance nor Gothic, are a symbol. How thoroughly his mind was endued with the humanistic spirit, how much the great poets of antiquity meant to him, may be known from one of his famous paragraphs, one of the supreme things of our speech:

Let us consider, too, how differently young and old are affected by the words of some classic author, such as Homer or Horace. Passages, which to a boy are but rhetorical commonplaces, neither better nor worse than a hundred others, which any clever writer might supply, which he gets by heart and thinks very fine, and imitates, as he thinks, successfully, in his own flowing versification, at length come home to him, when long years have passed, and he has had experience of life, and pierce him, as if he had never before known them, with their sad earnestness and vivid exactness. Then he comes to understand how it is that lines, the birth of some chance morning or evening at an Ionian festival, or among the Sabine hills, have lasted generation after generation, for thousands of years, with a power over the mind, and a charm which the current literature of his own day, with all its obvious advantages, is utterly unable to rival. Perhaps this is the reason of the mediaeval opinion about Virgil, as of a prophet or a magician; his single words and phrases, his pathetic half-lines, giving utterance, as the voice of Nature herself, to that pain and weariness, yet hope of better things, which is the experience of her children in every time.

That is the purest humanism. It is the classic tradition carried in a mind fitted by nature and by long training to live in the clear air of the antique world. It is, or was until yesterday, the finest

flower of our education. It characterizes the more open nurture of the Anglican church. Yet all this Newman was to surrender, borne away by the narrower and intenser current of mediaevalism, to his own and our incalculable loss. You may hear his recantation in the chapter on "Christianity and Letters" in *The Idea of a University*:

And while we thus recur to Greece and Athens with pleasure and affection, and recognize in that famous land the source and the school of intellectual culture, it would be strange indeed if we forgot to look further south also, and there to bow before a more glorious luminary, and a more sacred oracle of truth, and the source of another sort of knowledge, high and supernatural, which is seated in Palestine. Jerusalem is the fountain-head of religious knowledge, as Athens is of secular.

The English priest's language is suaver than was that of the Italian pope from whom I have already quoted but beneath the surface he is saying nothing different from the haughty and rude Gregory: "One goes to the Philistines to sharpen one's plow, because secular learning is needed as a training for Christian preaching."

This, then, is the paradox of Oxford. It is a thing of the past, you will say, and came to end soon after the departure of Newman for his spiritual Rome. So in a way it is, and there's the pity of it. The world could not forever rest the higher elements of its civilization on ideas which are mutually destructive: on the one side the human ideal of development through self-control in accordance with the law of the Golden Mean, on the other that of salvation through self-surrender and ascetic virtue; and in these latter years, having freed ourselves from unquestioning submission to authority, we have eased ourselves of the difficulty of reconciling the two traditions by throwing over the past altogether as a criterion of life. The classics have pretty well gone, and if we study them at all it is as if they were dead languages, useful it may be as a gymnastic discipline for the mind, but with little or no sense that they contain a body of human experience and tried wisdom by which we may still guide our steps as we stumble upon the dark ways of this earth. And so, however our churches may lift their spires into the air and however our priests may repeat the sacrifice of the Eucharist, for the world

at large the mediaeval meaning of atonement and the binding force of these symbols have been forgotten or are fast forgetting; some consolation they may give and some hope they may offer, but it is largely through their aesthetic appeal, and the law of God is not in them. In place of the secular tradition of the classics we have turned to science, and in place of obedience to the will of God we are seeking for salvation in humanitarian sympathy with our brother men. And these things are well in their way, but they do not supply and can never supply the comfort and elevation of the other disciplines. Science, with all its perspicacity, can see no place within its scheme for what is after all the heart of humanity and the source of true humanism—the consciousness of something within us that stands apart from material law and guides itself to ends of happiness and misery which do not belong to nature. And humanitarianism, however it may be concerned with human destinies and however it may call upon our emotions, leaves out of account the deep thirst of the soul for the infinite wells of peace; it has forgotten the scriptural promise of peace and the truth which St. Augustine knew: *Quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*—“For thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted until it resteth in thee.”

No, there is a great lack in our life today, which we feel and secretly acknowledge to ourselves, despite much bragging of progress and much outward scorn of the things we have cast away. I shall not expatiate now on this fact, of which many, if not all, of you are at bottom, I think, as fully conscious as I am. At any rate time and the occasion force me to take it for granted, and to beg your consideration of the means at our disposal for restoring what has been lost. And first of all there can be no sound restoration unless we can escape that paradox of civilization symbolized by the stones of Oxford. Now one relief from the dilemma is obvious and sure: we can sacrifice one of the opposing traditions entirely and cling to the other. And for my part, if it is necessary, I am ready to throw overboard all that has come to us from the Middle Ages. The gain for education would in some directions be clear and immediate. To leave Anglo-Saxon to a few specialists and to cut it out of the common curriculum designed for discipline and culture would have

happy results in the study of English; to waive the remote and doubtful benefits of Gothic and the old Romance dialects for Goethe and Racine and others who carried on the classical tradition would be a fruitful saving of time.

No doubt there would be a great loss also to reckon with in such a choice. If nothing else, the religious literature of the age is a vast storehouse of intense and purifying passion from which each of us may draw and supply the lack in his individual emotions. You remember the scene at Ostia on the Tiber, when Augustine with his mother, who was now approaching the end of this life, stood alone together at the window looking into a garden, and talked of the things that are to be. And at the last of their speech they turned to the joy that should ravish the soul and swallow it up, when the tumults of the flesh were silenced, and the images of the earth and the waters and the air were silenced, and the poles of the sky were silent, and the very heart grew still to itself, and all dreams and visionary revelations, and every tongue and every sign were hushed in silence; and as they thus spoke the rapture of heaven came so near that this world was lost for them in contempt—*et mundus iste nobis inter verba vilesceret cum omnibus delectationibus suis*. That is the deep emotion that was passed from man to man and from soul to soul through the devastations of the Middle Ages, and with it the ecstatic cry of the saintly mother, *Quid hic facio*, “What do I here?” For those who have not imprisoned themselves in the life of the present, the sermons of St. Bernard, the great prayers and hymns of the church, even the austere dialectic of Thomas Aquinas, are a reservoir from which we may still draw that celestial and intoxicating drink. There are some of us—I confess that I myself am such a one—for whom, because of temperament or training, the closing of that source would mean an irreparable loss. Yet we are so impressed by a greater need of the world, that we are ready to lay iconoclastic hands on the whole fabric of the Middle Ages and to sweep it away altogether, with all its good and all its evil. It may be that no such harsh procedure is necessary. Indeed, as I have said, the mediaeval tradition, so far as our schools are concerned, has come to have so little vital force, it is so much a mere *cadaver* for the seminar, that

in advocating its elimination from the common curriculum, we shall scarcely be doing violence to anything useful or sacred. It is possible, furthermore, that, if ever we have another renaissance in our education and the past is taken up again as a living and creative power in the imagination, some means may be discovered to effect that reconciliation between the classical and mediaeval views which the earlier Renaissance desired but could not find.

But that is more or less chimerical. What lies at our hands, and what I believe thoughtful men are more and more beginning to recognize as imperative for our higher intellectual and artistic life, is a clear understanding of the paradoxical nature of the bases upon which education has until recently stood, with the consequences thereof, and a return, if possible, to pure classical tradition and discipline. I am aware that this recognition is still of a vague and ineffective sort, while in practice Greek is certainly losing ground day by day and Latin is scarcely gaining. But a good deal of futile-seeming talk has before now preceded an actual revolution, and who shall say that the tide may not turn at any hour and the classics which we praise and neglect may not almost suddenly step into their own again? At any rate it behooves those who are now teaching Greek and Latin, with a feeling of despair perhaps, to lay to heart what hope they can, and to make sure that, when the change comes, if it do indeed come, they may be found ready and fully prepared to give the world what it needs. Meanwhile they have a plain task and duty. It may seem vague and impractical to talk of maintaining a tradition for some future change in the whole trend of a civilization; there is at least something clear and close at hand which the teacher can do, and which may confer a benefit upon himself and upon what earnest pupils he has.

In the first place, those who are teaching can effect a certain reform in their methods. We have gained a good deal from German scholarship, but we have also lost something. Let us, if we can, retain the diligence and accuracy which have come from the German seminar, but let us remember that the tendency of the past century has been to make of the classics a closed field for the investigating specialist and to draw the attention away from their value as a literary discipline containing an imperishable criticism

of life. That evil has been recognized, and we are trying to remedy it. But at the present time we may be led astray by what may seem in itself a peculiar advantage to the classicist—I mean the discovery of a vast body of Greek writing which lies, so to speak, on the outskirts of literature, and the unearthing of great archaeological treasures. These things are undoubtedly good in themselves, and they may be used to give a vividness and reality to ancient life such as we have never had. But they contain also a real danger. After all, these inscriptions and discoveries scarcely touch on what is the vital classical tradition—the interpretation of the human heart and those glimpses into the destinies for which we go to Homer and Sophocles and Plato and Lucretius and Virgil. It is possible that archaeology may throw the emphasis on the wrong place and obscure the true issues. I say then, with due deference to those who have more authority to speak than I have, that the first thing to do is to see that archaeology, valuable and interesting as it is, be kept in its proper relative place, and be not allowed to dazzle our eyes by the wonder of its discoveries.

What we need chiefly is a deeper knowledge and finer understanding of those few authors who are really the classics. We need to reassure ourselves that as pure human literature they still stand supreme and unapproached. I for one am ready to avow my opinion, and I believe that no great advance in the classics is possible until this belief is proclaimed boldly and generally, that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have a beauty and humanity that no modern epic poet has ever touched—not Milton himself, though I adore Milton this side idolatry. There is no lyric poetry in modern tongues that has the music and exquisite feeling of Sappho's Lesbian songs, or the soaring strength of Pindar's impassioned vision. No one else has ever quite caught again the mellow suavity of Horace. No later philosopher has translated the eternal verities into such perfect speech as Plato. I have seen Edwin Booth in *Lear* and *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, and felt the grip of Shakespeare at my very heart. But I have seen a band of young amateurs present the *Agamemnon* in the Stadium at Harvard, and through the crudeness of their acting and the helplessness of the chorus and the disadvantage of a language I could scarcely follow, I still knew that here was a higher

form of drama than anything on the modern stage, and that the art of Aeschylus was profounder and more everlasting in its emotional appeal than Shakespeare's even.

The teacher who desires to impress his pupils with the value and greatness of classical literature must first feel those qualities himself. He may, perhaps, think that my estimation of the ancient poets is relatively overdrawn, though I mean to speak only my sober conviction, but he must at least read those poets, read and read, and steep his mind in their images and phrases. But it is even more important, as things now are, that he should ponder the ideas that underlie the ancient poets and philosophers, their ethical interpretation of individual and social experience, not only as these ideas are expressed directly and didactically, but more particularly in that glancing and suggestive manner which Matthew Arnold meant to convey in his phrase "the criticism of life." For, frankly, if a man is not convinced that the classics contain a treasure of practical and moral wisdom which is imperatively needed as a supplement to the one-sided theories of the present day and as a corrective of much that is distorted in our views, he had better take up some other subject to teach than Greek or Latin. The subject is too large and debatable to deal with in a paragraph. But two famous stanzas from Wordsworth and Coleridge, who did more than any other poets to fashion the higher ethical feeling of the age, may give a hint of where the discussion would lead. You may guess the stanza from Wordsworth:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Literally taken the idea of these lines is, of course, sheer humbug, and Wordsworth no doubt wrote them in a vein of playfulness; but after all they agree with a good deal of the easy philosophy of the century, and they are the precise poetical equivalent of the scientific study of nature which has displaced the humanities. The other stanza is from *The Ancient Mariner*:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The sentiment, you will say, is innocent and pious enough, but it points unmistakably to the other tendency of the day, that humanitarian notion of indistinguishable sympathy which is rapidly becoming the religion of the people and the theme of serious literature to the exclusion of other ideals. Now, it is perfectly plain that the whole influence of classical literature is against the exaggeration of these naturalistic and humanitarian tendencies. Consider the meaning of one of Pindar's odes, or of Horace's epistles, or reflect on the ethics of Aristotle; the emphasis is everywhere on distinctions and judgment in place of sympathy, and on the grave responsibility of the individual man for the conduct of his own soul. Bacchylides in one brief memorable phrase has summed up the wisdom of his people: *ὅσια δρῶν εὐφραίνε θυμόν*—“doing what is right in the eyes of heaven, make glad your soul.” Unless the teacher is convinced that the pregnant meaning of those words may be used, and should be used, as a corrective of the naturalistic and humanitarian exaggerations of our day, he had better devote his energy to some other subject.

I am assuming, you see, that the classics contain in themselves an ideal capable of relieving us from the undue predominance of both the scientific philosophy and the humanitarianism of the day, but some of you may raise a doubt at this point. It is clear, you will say, that the humanism of the classics may be used to offset the inhumanity of our scientific absorption, but what have they to offer to balance the humanitarian absorption in comfort and the things of this world? How can they alone give us back what we have lost with the disappearance of the mediaeval belief in the infinite, omnipotent deity. This question has been forced upon my mind by reading a book from Oxford, by Mr. R. W. Livingstone, in support of the classical propaganda. Formerly it seemed sufficient to dwell on the aesthetic superiority of Greek art and literature, but of recent years that appeal has been reinforced by an attempt to set forth the ethical and practical value of Greek ideas for men today in the distraction of our own civilization. And so Mr. Livingstone calls his volume of essays “*The Greek Genius and Its Meaning to Us.*” The change is well, and may have its effect in time, though at present the new appeal may seem to fall on deaf ears.

Mr. Livingstone is right also in seeing that the crux of the matter is in the sense to be attached to the word "humanism." "There are few more important problems than this," he declares: "is humanism right? Is it right to take a purely human attitude towards life, to assume that man is the measure of all things, and to believe that, even though the unseen may be there, still we can know our duty and live our life without reference to it? That is perhaps the biggest question of the present day." The problem, so far as it goes, could not be stated more vigorously, and no one can read Mr. Livingstone's exposition of Greek humanism without pleasure and enlargement of mind. Yet in the end it is not quite plain that he has grasped the full force of the word. Certain writers, among whom not the least guilty is Professor Schiller, a philosophical Fellow of his own college, Corpus Christi, have deliberately clouded the meaning of "humanism" by confusing it with "humanitarianism," which is in fact its very opposite, and it is not clear that Mr. Livingstone, who may be taken as the spokesman of a common tendency among scholars, has escaped entirely from this entanglement. His praise of the Sophists as the true exponents of humanism, his acceptance of Nietzsche's sharp distinction between the Dionysian and Apollonian aspects of Greek civilization, his emphasis of the exotic side of Plato, and his rejection of Sophocles as the norm of Athenian genius are sufficient at least to raise a doubt in one's mind. "Man is the measure of all things"—no doubt that is humanism; it rejects the unseen and the infinite in so far as these are conceived to be superhuman or antihuman, and in this way it is antagonistic to the whole scope of mediaevalism; it rejects the superhuman, and, in a sense, the supernatural, but he is far from understanding its full scope who supposes that it necessarily excludes also the higher, even the divine, elements of the human soul itself. The error is not new. The Greeks gave us the sense of beauty, is an old saying, but they did so by limiting themselves to the finite laws of harmony and proportion; as a compensation the Middle Ages gave us the contrasted sense of the infinite. The most eloquent and authoritative expression of this view is Renan's famous Prayer on the Acropolis, in his *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*. Standing on that citadel

of the old Athenian faith, with the marvelous ruins of the Parthenon before his eyes, he uttered, in words you will remember, his adoration of the Goddess Athena:

O nobility! O simple and true beauty! Deity whose cult signifies reason and wisdom, thou whose temple is an eternal lesson in conscience and sincerity, I come late to the threshold of thy mysteries. To find thee there were needed for me endless studies. The invitation which thou gavest to the Athenian at his birth with a smile, I have conquered only by reflection and at the price of long labor. . . .

Dost thou remember that day, under the archonship of Dionysodorus, when a little ugly Jew, speaking the Greek of Syria, came hither, passed over thy sacred place, read thy inscriptions without understanding, and found in thy enclosure an altar, as he thought, dedicated to the *unknown God*? Ah well, this little Jew has won the day; for a thousand years thou, O Truth, wast treated as an idol; for a thousand years the world was a desert wherein no flower grew. . . . Goddess of order, image of the steadfastness of heaven, to love thee was accounted a sin, and today, now that by painful toil we have come nearer to thee, we are accused of committing a crime against the spirit of man. . . .

The world shall not be saved except it return to thee and repudiate its barbarian bonds.

So far our scholar goes in his praise of the spotless and radiant beauty of Athena, and then, as the surge of mediaevalism flows back upon him, he turns to its symbol in the great vault of St. Sophia at Byzantium with a cry of homesickness: "A great wave of forgetfulness carries us into a gulf without name. O abyss, thou art the only God!" (*O abîme, tu es le Dieu unique!*).

Now the application of this contrast between orderly finite beauty and the infinite conceived as a formless abyss, this opposition of the human and the divine, is doubly false. The Greeks have had no monopoly of the sense of beauty on the one hand, and on the other hand their submission to the laws of harmony by no means excludes that religious exaltation which we call, for lack of a better name, the infinite. Their great creation, their unique contribution to the world, was just the union of beauty and religious exaltation in forms which remain normally human—that, indeed, is humanism in the highest meaning of the word. If a man doubts the uniqueness of this gift he can easily persuade himself by looking at the Elgin marbles, which stood once on the Parthenon before which

Renan uttered his prayer, and comparing them with what he may see elsewhere of art and religious decoration. It is, more particularly, a dull soul that can stand before those weather-worn blocks of stone, commonly called the Three Fates, or even look upon their pictured likeness, and not feel, along with their wonder of sheer beauty, the strange lift and thrill of emotion, the mystery of deep opening within the heart to deep, which Renan professed to feel before the *abime*. There are endless treasures of beauty that owe nothing to Greece, there are, on the other hand, idols and temples everywhere which strike the beholder with awe; but this human sublimity will scarcely be found, or if found, whether in the Western Renaissance or in the Buddhistic art of the Far East, can be traced somehow to the influence of Greece. Wherever this influence has not passed, you will see a divorce between measured human beauty and religious exaltation, and an attempt to express the infinite by symbols that are either exaggerated or grotesque or merely vague. The Hindu who wishes to image the divine wisdom will carve an idol with many heads, or if he wishes to set forth the divine power, will give to his god a hundred arms. The men of the Middle Ages knew well enough what is beautiful, but when they undertook to visualize the saint they made him meager and unlovely. Even the cathedrals seek the impression of sublimity by spaces and lines that overwhelm the worshiper with the sense of his littleness; they may be beautiful, but they are not human. Goethe could create beauty, but when, in his romantic and mediaeval mood, he thought of the power which speaks to us so humanly in the Three Fates he could only express it in the vague and grotesque symbolism of the mystic Mothers.

The true humanism, which speaks in the stones of the Parthenon, does not possess authority and saving power because the human is there regarded as excluding the divine, but the very contrary. The Elgin marbles merely put into visible form the philosophy of Plato, who was ready to follow as a god any man who knew how to combine in his conduct the law of the one and the law of the many; they express the same truth which Aristotle taught in his *Ethics*, that virtue is the golden mean of self-control rather than any excess of self-sacrifice, but that the golden mean is rightly

known only to him who desires in contemplation to behold the unmoved, all-moving unity. If we forget this composite meaning of humanism, we shall confuse it either with the hard, dry formalism of the pseudo-classics, or with the sentiment of modern humanitarianism.

I do not presume to say that the opposition between the classical and mediaeval traditions may not in some way be reconciled, or that the paradox to which I have been calling your attention is forever insoluble. But I am sure that for those who believe that no great art and no sure comfort for the questing human spirit can come from an education based overwhelmingly on science and humanitarianism, and who hope for a regeneration of the vivifying ideals of the past—I am sure that for such as these the one practical course is to steep their own minds in the great and proved writers of the ancient world, to nourish their inner life on that larger humanism which embraces the spiritual as well as the aesthetic needs of mankind, and then, if they be teachers of the classics, simply to teach as they can, omitting nothing of rigid discipline, however repellent that discipline may be, but giving also to the pupil from the overflowing fulness of their faith and joy.

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